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# Jews, Not Italians, Dominated American Organized Crime, Which Was Far More Powerful Than People Realize

By Ron Unz ( The Unz Review ) on Thursday, July 18, 2019 - 05:00

As I was growing up in the suburban San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s, organized crime seemed like a very distant thing, confined to the densely-populated cities of the East Coast or to America's past, much like the corrupt political machines with which it was usually associated.



The Honorable David L. Bazelon, Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia

I never heard any stories of ballot-box stuffing or political precinct captains controlling a swath of no-show city jobs or traffic tickets being “fixed” by a friend at City Hall. The notion of local grocery stores paying protection money or taking numbers bets from their clientele on behalf of bookies would have seemed quite outlandish to me.

All these personal impressions were strongly reinforced by the electronic media that so heavily shapes our perceptions of reality. A couple of the popular shows I sometimes

watched in reruns were the police procedural dramas *Dragnet* and *Adam-12*, both set in Southern California, and although each episode focused on one or more serious crimes, these were almost never of the “organized” variety. The same was true for *Perry Mason* episodes, although those longer courtroom dramas would have been naturally suited to the plotting of Syndicate members.

The popular *Rockford Files* of the late 1970s did sometimes feature mobsters, but these individuals were almost always temporary visitors to LA from New York or Chicago or Las Vegas, with the plotlines sometimes humorously treating these gangsters as struggling fish out of water in the very different world of sunny Southern California. By contrast, a contemporaneous detective show set in New York like *Kojak* seemed to feature mafioso characters in every third or fourth episode.

The offerings of the Silver Screen generally followed the same pattern. Gangster films, ranging from the crudest B-flick to the Academy Award-winning *Godfather* masterpieces, were almost never set on the West Coast. And although a film like Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* might be focused on the deadly criminal intrigues of the 1930s Los Angeles financial elites, the villain was just a ruthless businessman, employing a couple of murderous hired thugs.

Children soon become aware that the dramatic concoctions of Hollywood are not necessarily accurate, but when everything we see on screens big and small so closely matches our direct personal experience, that amalgamation of images and daily life produces a very firm sense of reality.

Even the occasional exception seemed to support the general rule. In the 1970s, I remember once watching a local television news crew interview an elderly Jewish man named Mickey Cohen on a local park bench, breathlessly describing him as having once been the reigning mobster king of Los Angeles. While I didn’t doubt that in bygone days the crotchety little fellow had once been a hardened criminal, I remained somewhat skeptical that LA had ever contained enough gangsters to warrant having a king, let alone that such a figure would have been drawn from our notoriously law-abiding Jewish community.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s crime became a steadily rising problem in the once-quiet suburbs of Los Angeles, but virtually none of those incidents seemed much like a Francis Ford Coppola epic. The Crips and Bloods of South-Central regularly killed each other and innocent bystanders, while burglaries and robberies—as well as occasional rapes and murders—sometimes spilled over the Hollywood Hills into the Valley. Terrifying serial killers like the Hillside Strangler provoked widespread fear as did the horrible deeds of the Manson Family, while the fiery final shootout of the Symbionese Liberation Army near Inglewood drew national headlines; but none of this seemed much like activities of the Gambinos or Columbos of NYC. Indeed, I and my friends would sometimes joke that since the Mafia was supposedly so effective at keeping street crime away from its New York neighborhoods, perhaps LA would have been better off if it had had a sizeable Sicilian population.

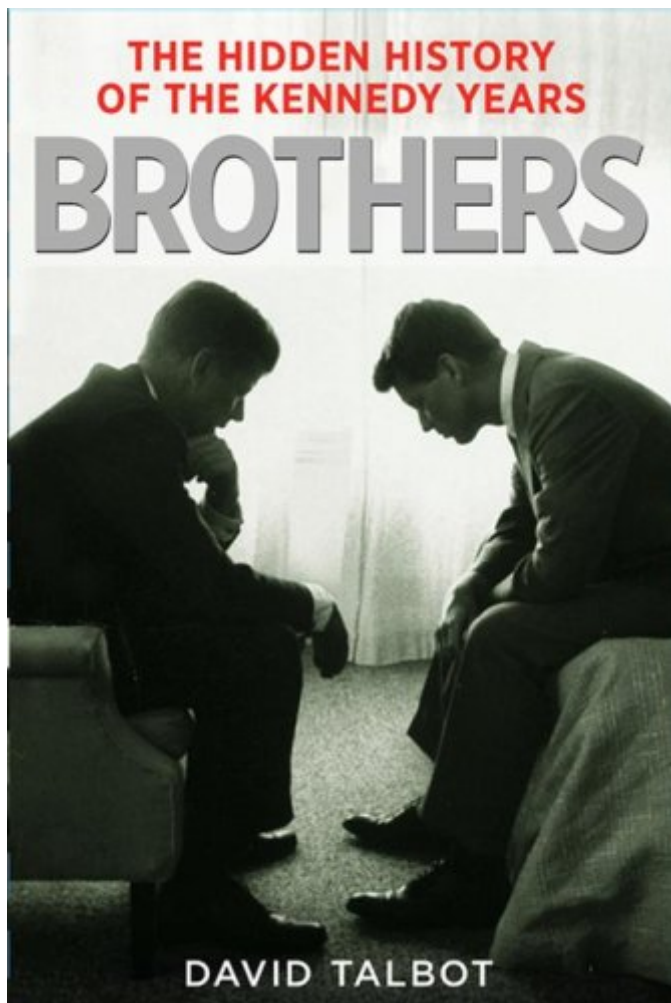
When I sometimes gave the matter a little thought, the utter lack of any organized crime in California seemed fairly easy to explain. East Coast cities had been settled by waves of foreign immigrants, impoverished newcomers who spoke no English, and their total ignorance of American ways left them quite vulnerable to criminal exploitation. Such situations were an ideal breeding ground for corruption, political machines, and crime syndicates, with the centuries-old secret societies of Sicily and Southern Italy providing the obvious seeds for the last of those. Meanwhile, most of California had been settled by longstanding American citizens, often relocating from the placid Midwest, with Iowans who

spoke perfect English and whose families had been voting in U.S. elections for six generations being far less vulnerable to political intimidation or criminal exploitation.

Since organized crime obviously did not exist in California, I was never quite sure how much to believe about its supposed size and power elsewhere in the country. Al Capone had been imprisoned and died decades before I was born and with the end of Roaring Twenties, violent gangsterism seemed to have mostly disappeared as well.

Every now and then the newspapers might carry the story of an Eastern Mafia chieftain killed by his rivals, but those occasional events provided little indication about the power those individuals had wielded while alive. In 1977, teenage members of an obscure Chinese immigrant street gang in San Francisco used automatic weapons to attack their rivals at a local restaurant, leaving sixteen dead or wounded, a body-count that seemed comparable to the total number of traditional Mafia killings nationwide over a period of several years.

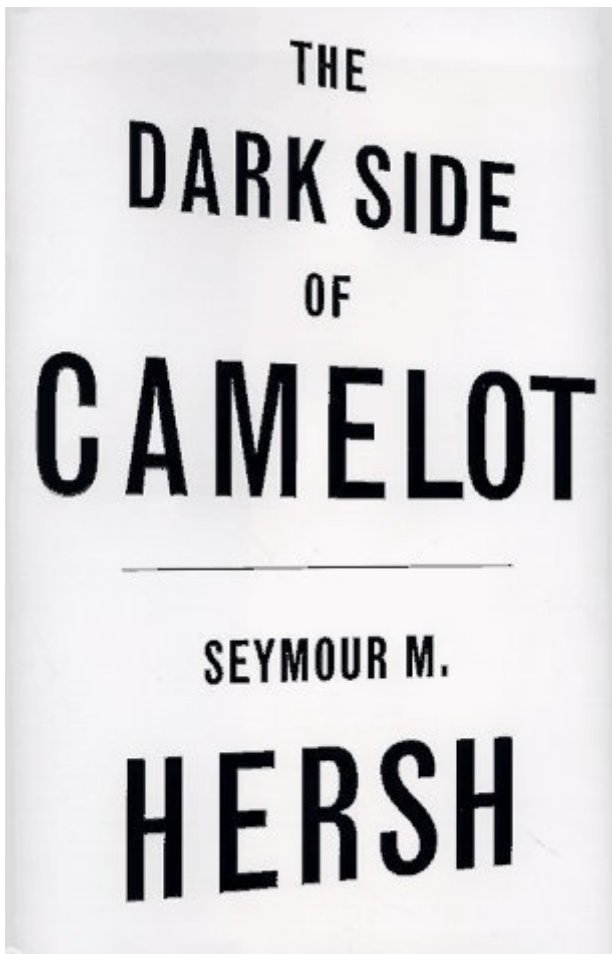
During the 1970s I also starting hearing lurid tales that the Mafia had stolen the 1960 election for President John F. Kennedy and might even have been involved in his subsequent assassination, but the respectable media seemed to treat those claims with enormous scorn, so I tended to regard them as *National Enquirer* type nonsense, not much different than ridiculous UFO stories. Growing up when I did, the Kennedys had seemed like America's own royal family, and I was very skeptical that control of the White House at the absolute height of the American Century had been swung by Mafia bosses. There were stories that Old Joe Kennedy, the family patriarch, had dabbled in bootlegging during the 1920s, but that had been during Prohibition, a very different era than the aftermath of the quiet and prosperous Eisenhower years of the 1950s.



Twentieth century American history had never been of much interest to me, so I am not entirely sure at what point my understanding of these issues began to change. I think it may

have been just a few years ago, when I was absolutely shocked to discover that there was overwhelming evidence that the JFK Assassination had indeed been part of a large conspiracy, a revelation absolutely contrary to what I had always been led to believe by the media throughout my life.

But when a highly-regarded national journalist such as David Talbot gathered the copious evidence in his book *Brothers*, and his conclusions were endorsed by an eminent presidential historian such as Alan Brinkley writing [in the pages](#) of the august *New York Times*, such a shift became unavoidable. And it seemed clear that elements of organized crime had been heavily involved in that presidential assassination.



My awakening to the reality of the JFK Assassination took some time to digest, but a year or so later I began investigating that era more carefully, and decided to finally read *The Dark Side of Camelot*, a huge 1997 bestseller by Seymour Hersh, perhaps our most renowned investigative journalist. Although it focused primarily on the long-suppressed misdeeds of the Kennedy Administration and only lightly touched upon the assassination that ended it, nearly all of the material seemed very consistent with what I had recently read in the other books centered entirely upon the 1963 events in Dallas. And the longtime relationship between the Kennedys and organized crime, sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly, was absolutely eye-opening for what it revealed about the immense hidden power of that latter social institution.

When several highly-regarded journalists come to identical conclusions and back their shocking claims with copious credible evidence, we must accept the reality of what they have presented.

For example, it seems absolutely undeniable that the Chicago Syndicate helped steal the 1960 election for Kennedy, using their control over the election machinery of that extremely

corrupt city to carry the Illinois's crucial 27 electoral votes and place JFK in the White House instead of his opponent Vice President Richard Nixon.

That outcome had been accomplished through the intense personal lobbying of top mob bosses by Joseph Kennedy, Sr. His efforts were greatly assisted by the advocacy of singer Frank Sinatra, an entertainer with strong personal ties both to the Kennedys and the underworld, and the Syndicate believed they had an understanding that a victorious Kennedy Administration would go easy on them. But instead, newly appointed Attorney-General Robert Kennedy redoubled the government's war on organized crime, leading outraged mob boss Sam Giancana to nearly order the killing of Sinatra in retaliation. Certainly the perceived betrayal greatly facilitated the involvement of various gangster elements in the subsequent Dallas assassination.

Ironically enough, organized crime itself had been sharply divided in that 1960 election. Jimmy Hoffa, head of the very powerful and fully mobbed-up Teamsters Union, had become a bitter foe of Robert Kennedy during the latter's 1957 service as Chief Counsel of the Senate "Rackets Committee," and Hoffa therefore became one of Nixon's most important backers, secretly delivering his campaign committee a million dollars in cash and encouraging all the Teamster locals and the affiliated gangster groups he could influence to give the Republican candidate their enthusiastic support.

The actual relationship between crime lords and the new American president was a complex and contradictory one, with brother Robert fiercely prosecuting the mob even as the CIA enlisted the support of the same groups—and sometimes even the same individuals—in their unsuccessful efforts to assassinate Cuba's Communist dictator, Fidel Castro.

Although I was quite surprised when I discovered that all these gossipy rumors were actually based upon solid evidence, even more shocking were the less sanguinary facts that finally came to my attention. Although scrupulously ignored by respectable journalists and historians, there was strong evidence that elements of organized crime had already deeply penetrated the commanding heights of corporate America, and sometimes secured important government decisions on their behalf.

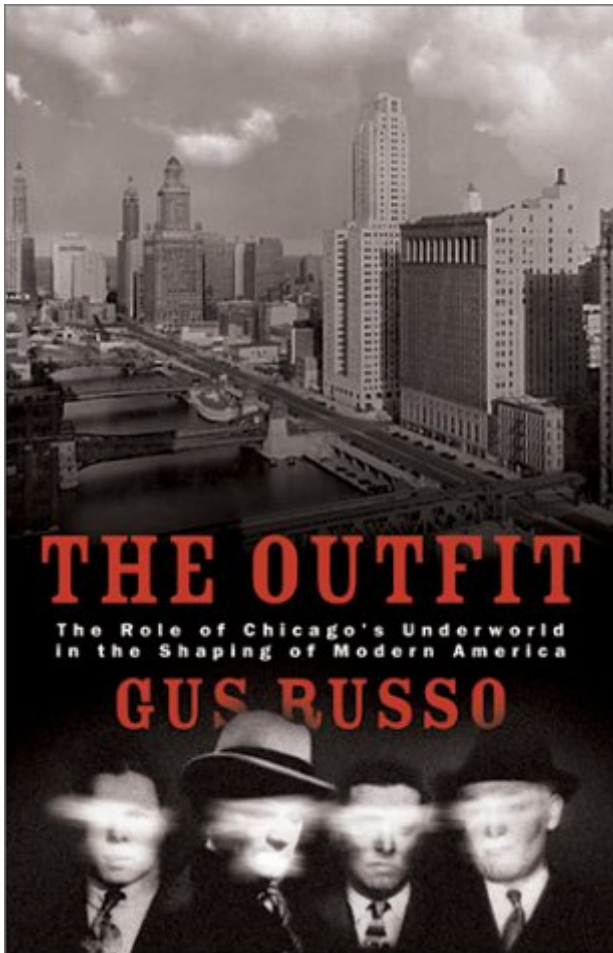
Consider, for example, the General Dynamics corporation, which already ranked as one of America's leading defense contractors by the 1950s, and whose name had always held a vague place in my mind not too different from that of Lockheed or Boeing. Years earlier I had read with considerable shock [an offhand paragraph](#) by the late journalist Alexander Cockburn, a fearless muckraker:

Talking of continuity, a notorious scandal of the Kennedy years was JFK's defense secretary, Robert McNamara, overruling all expert review and procurement recommendations and insisting that General Dynamics rather than Boeing make the disastrous F-111, at that time one of the largest procurement contracts in the Pentagon's history...Crown, of Chicago Sand and Gravel, had \$300 million of the mob's money in General Dynamics' debentures, and after the disaster of the Convair, General Dynamics needed the F-111 to avoid going belly-up, taking the mob's \$300 million with it.

Although I later became quite friendly with Cockburn and respected his opinion, at the time I treated his casual claims with considerable skepticism. However, Hersh's far more detailed coverage fully confirmed that story, and reported some of its even more amazing details. Apparently agents of the aerospace corporation were observed burglarizing the home of JFK's favorite mistress, and Hersh suggested that the incriminating blackmail evidence they presumably obtained was the reason why Defense Secretary Robert McNamara overruled all of his Pentagon brass and awarded the largest military government contract in world history to the Syndicate-backed firm. Moreover, even by

government procurement standards, the resulting F-111 was a particular disaster, never achieving any of its intended performance goals despite suffering nearly 700% in cost-overruns. So a financial investment of organized crime was salvaged at great cost both to our military effectiveness and to the taxpayer.

Given that organized crime had apparently played a far greater national role in twentieth century American history than I had realized from my readings of mainstream newspapers and magazines, I recently decided to expand my knowledge in that area. Someone brought to my attention the work of investigative journalist Gus Russo, a prominent author on that topic. Russo had worked as a lead reporter for the award-winning PBS *Frontline* series and filled similar roles at other television networks, while being nominated for a 1998 Pulitzer Prize for his book on the JFK-Mafia alliance against Castro.



Over a dozen years ago, Russo published a pair of massive volumes on the history of organized crime focused on two particular regions, with *The Outfit* in 2001 discussing Chicago and *Supermob* in 2006 dealing with California. Taken together these two works of deep investigative research run more than 1100 pages and over a half million words, apparently dwarfing almost anything else in that subject area.

By the 1990s declassification of a vast quantity of government documents, including FBI wiretaps and Congressional files, allowed Russo access to this previously unavailable material. He supplemented this crucial archival research with the secondary source material contained in hundreds of books and articles, as well as more than 200 personal interviews, and his especially extensive second volume references this wealth of source material with more than 1500 footnotes. The numerous laudatory cover-blurbs by prominent prosecutors, former law enforcement agents, and experts on organized crime strongly attest to the credibility of his research, which certainly must have absorbed many years of concentrated effort.

As a newcomer to the subject of the Chicago Syndicate, my first surprise was the remarkable continuity and longevity of that criminal enterprise. I had always vaguely assumed that after Al Capone's imprisonment and the repeal of Prohibition, his gang had largely disintegrated or at least had lost most of its power, but this was entirely incorrect. Instead, over the next few decades, Capone's successors greatly reduced the public violence that had provoked a harsh federal crackdown, but simultaneously multiplied their wealth and power by gaining control of numerous other sources of revenue, many of them legitimate unions and businesses, and also expanded their geographical reach across various other states. Chicago's gangland leadership also seemed remarkably stable throughout most of the next half-century, so that even as late as the 1970s, the paramount Syndicate authority was exercised by an individual who had originally enlisted with Capone in the 1920s as a violent young hoodlum, allegedly soon winning widespread renown by beating to death two of Big Al's treacherous henchmen with a baseball bat.

Authors have a natural tendency to emphasize the importance of their particular subjects, but I think Russo makes a persuasive case that the unity and stability of the Chicago underworld gave it a considerable advantage over its New York City counterparts, whose permanent division into five separate Mafia families led to an uneasy local peace occasionally punctuated by violent conflict. As a result, the disunited New York gangsters were never able to exercise much control over their local city government let alone the rival criminal power-centers of other East Coast cities, while the Chicago Syndicate seems to have always been a very powerful force in city politics, and successfully extended its suzerainty throughout much of the Midwest, the Rocky Mountain states, and into California.

Another surprise was the ethnic skew of the Chicago Outfit and its closest collaborators. Across the East Coast, full Mafia membership was traditionally restricted to Sicilians or other Italians, but none of those rules seemed to apply in the Windy City. During the 1920s there had been a series of bloody battles between Capone's Italian mob and the violent Irish gangsters who controlled the Northside, with Jews being substantially represented in both groups. But Capone had steadily eliminated his opponents, winning a final, crushing victory with the St. Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929, after which Irish names mostly disappear from the crime narrative, while the presence of Slavs or Germans had always been rare, despite their huge local populations.

But although the top Syndicate leadership remained almost entirely Italian—with a Welsh immigrant being the sole exception—roughly half of all the key figures found in Russo's detailed narrative turned out to be Jewish. From the 1930s onward, organized crime in Chicago was essentially an Italian-Jewish partnership, with the Italians concentrating on the violent muscle side of the business and the Jews more likely to be involved in money-laundering, political corruption, and legal manipulation.

The deep underworld links of individuals whom my mainstream histories had never characterized as "mobbed up" was eye-opening. For example, I'd always known of Walter Annenberg as the very wealthy publisher of TV Guide and a close friend of the Reagans, endowing the massive Annenberg Foundation to support various non-profit projects, including PBS. However, the family fortune had been established by his father Moe Annenberg, who created America's largest bookie wire service in close alliance with Capone and his Chicago successors. The elder Annenberg eventually served time in federal prison for evading taxes on his enormous illegal income and paid the largest tax fine in American history, while arranging that charges were dropped against his son Walter, who was his partner in the business. Russo actually defends Annenberg, arguing that he was unfairly targeted for prosecution by the Roosevelt Administration because of his political opposition to FDR.

As another example, my history textbooks had frequently mentioned that President Harry Truman had been a product of the Pendergast machine of Kansas City, Missouri, whose activities I'd always assumed were restricted to local politics and perhaps a bit of municipal graft. But according to Russo, the city was second only to Chicago in its degree of municipal corruption, with the local police force run by an ex-Capone mobster and ten percent of the officers having criminal records, while Pendergast himself had been a prominent participant at the 1929 national gangster convention in Atlantic City as well as later mob summits. Truman's handwritten journal records the criminal actions he had regularly allowed in return for his elected judgeship.

According to Russo, Pendergast later decided to elevate Truman to the U.S. Senate mostly to gain protection from the backlash over the recent local murder of four federal agents, and Truman's victorious Senate campaign had involved several additional killings. Over the course of the Truman Administration, Attorney-General Tom Clark was apparently promoted to the Supreme Court in exchange for arranging the early release of a top Capone lieutenant who was then serving time in federal prison, a scandal that led the *Chicago Tribune* to demand Clark's impeachment.

Truman himself had reached the White House because he was placed on the 1944 ticket as FDR's Vice President, and his nomination had been pushed by garment union leader Sidney Hillman, president of the CIO and sometimes described as the second most powerful man in America. According to contemporaneous news accounts backed by declassified government files, the successful rise of Hillman's union had been facilitated by a close alliance with the gangsters of New York's Murder, Inc., whose leader Lepke Buchalter was eventually executed for one of Hillman's hits.

During this era, the huge growth in the power and influence of organized crime had not passed unnoticed by those outside its orbit, who sometimes chose to focus upon it for their own reasons, but often suffered unexpected setbacks. In 1950 freshman Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver decided to raise his public profile for a future presidential run by leading a national crusade against gangster power and holding public hearings to vilify their leaders. However, Kefauver was a notorious womanizer and during his preliminary visit to Chicago, compromising photos were taken of him in the arms of two mob-supplied women, after which the Senator changed his mind about requiring testimony from his top Syndicate target.

Sometimes real life gangsters impinged upon their Hollywood counterparts in ironic ways. In 1959 Desi Arnaz began producing *The Untouchables*, a popular television show presenting weekly Prohibition Era battles between G-Man Eliot Ness and mobsters Al Capone and Frank Nitti, with the TV drama playing a major role in shaping the public perceptions of organized crime.

According to later mob memoirs, the top Chicago gangsters soon became outraged at what they regarded as a highly inaccurate portrayal of their own history and one which they regarded as slanderous toward Italian-Americans, so after Arnaz ignored the warnings they sent him via Frank Sinatra, they arranged to have him killed. But their California agents dragged their feet about assassinating the longtime star of *I Love Lucy*, and Capone's widow soon vetoed the hit because her son had been Arnaz's best friend during their days as Florida high school classmates.

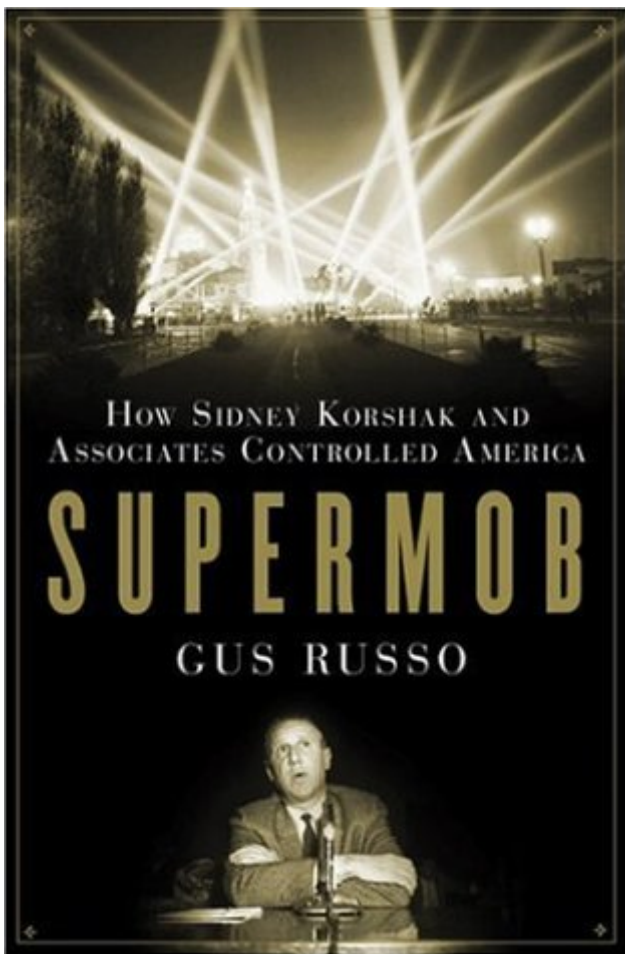
This very crude attempt of Chicago's Italian gangsters to modify the perceived ethnic aspects of a simple television show raises a much broader point, which should be carefully considered. Aside from our personal experiences in real life, nearly everything we know about the world comes from the media, with electronic entertainment being especially dominant for most people. During the 1930s and 1940s gangster movies of varying quality

had been quite popular, and to some extent *The Untouchables* helped revive that genre for the newly powerful medium of television. Meanwhile, with the exception of cartoon-focused Disney, all of Hollywood's major studios had almost always been owned or run by Jews, who also controlled all our radio and television networks. So for decades nearly everything ordinary Americans heard or saw arrived through that very specific ethnic filter.

The popular perceptions of the nature of organized crime demonstrated the impact of that situation. Throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, gangsters were sometimes presented without any clear ethnic tinge, frequently as Italians or perhaps Irish, but only very rarely identified as Jewish, thus establishing an implicit framework of reality that was considerably misleading.

As I gradually came to recognize this distortion of history a couple of decades ago, I once decided to conduct a simple thought-experiment by mentally listing the dozen most prominent figures that casually came to my mind from the Gangster Era. Al Capone was obviously the most infamous, followed by Lucky Luciano, Meyer Lansky, and Bugsy Siegel. After that came a number of somewhat lesser figures: Frank Costello, Legs Diamond, Lepke Buchalter, Dutch Schultz, Bugsy Moran, Johnny Torrio, Hymie Weiss, and Arnold Rothstein.

I had never studied American crime history so my list was vague and impressionistic, but I was surprised to realize that a milieu I'd always regarded as overwhelmingly Italian was actually mostly Jewish, suggesting that I had accepted the misleading headlines of a historical narrative without focusing upon its actual contents. Indeed, [Brooklyn's notorious Murder Inc.](#) was originally established by Lansky and Siegel and seems to have been overwhelmingly Jewish, while living up to its name by its many hundreds of killings, with one of its leading members supposedly having a personal body-count of over 100 or even far higher. But since I'd never heard of a single Jewish gangster in Chicago, I was still very surprised that such individuals comprised nearly half of the leading figures in Russo's comprehensive history.



Russo's 2001 volume may well rank as the definitive history of Chicago organized crime, and after years of additional research he published *Supermob*, a 2006 sequel focused upon my own state of California, which I found even more interesting and deeply disturbing. While his first book was primarily an account of a city's underworld and its evolution under the heirs of Al Capone, this one told the story of how individuals who had gotten their start among those Syndicate gangsters went on to achieve far greater wealth and power in the "upperworld" of business respectability. And the ethnic dimensions of organized crime, which had been an important subtext of that first work became absolutely central to this second one.

His sweeping narrative explains that during the years immediately following World War II, a group of interconnected individuals who were alumni of the Chicago Syndicate relocated to California and largely took over the politics of the Golden State, even while the local and national media averted their eyes from these important developments, rendering them invisible to the general public. He makes a strong case for the reality of such extraordinary claims.

An important point emphasized by the author is that this transformation was facilitated by the political reforms of former governor Hiram Johnson and other leading California progressives in the early decades of the twentieth century. Seeking to prevent the rise of the political "bossism" endemic to many Eastern states, they had drastically curtailed the power of political parties by allowing candidate cross-registration and other measures intended to greatly reduce the influence of the party infrastructure.

But the state's population then skyrocketed by over 50% between 1940 and 1950 and by nearly another 50% in the decade that followed, largely due to new arrivals from elsewhere in the country. With parties having little power and most candidates being unknown to the vast influx of new California voters, advertising money became the crucial ingredient of political success in such a huge state with expensive media markets, so those able to raise

the necessary funding might rise very quickly in political circles. Furthermore, individuals who had been trained in the ruthless political jungle of Chicago found naive California a far easier environment in which to operate.

Art White, a leading Los Angeles political reporter of that era, later explained these unusual political circumstances:

California was to become a state full of strangers, political waifs and mavericks who registered in their party of preference only to find that they had come to a place where political ideology was of no importance. Republicans ran as Democrats and Democrats ran as Republicans. With disconcerting regularity, Republicans, having won both party nominations, were elected in the primaries.

Since party designations had no meaning to the electorate, elections were won by the candidate with the most money, the greatest number of billboards, direct mail pieces, and the most radio time.

Any individual who could devise a system to furnish these campaign necessities on a sustained basis was on his way to becoming a political boss, California style. The boss...could have a say, perhaps the final word, in the appointment of judges from the municipal courts to the state supreme court. Other appointive jobs included inheritance tax appraisers, deputy attorney generals, state department heads and commissioners of departments. With a handful of such appointments in his pocket, the boss could protect his economic interests.

One of the most striking examples of such rapid success was the career of former Chicago attorney Paul Ziffren, whose meteoric rise in the backroom world of California politics was fueled by his ability to raise enormous sums of money for his favored candidates. Soon after arriving in Los Angeles during the mid-1940s, his strong relationship with the Truman White House allowed him to quickly supplant the leading local Democrats in national influence. By 1953 he had been named the Democratic National Committeeman for California, and was hailed for “reinvigorating” the state party, which had successfully captured both houses of the state legislature for the first time in 75 years. He won the fulsome praise of the party’s National Chairman, who described him as the most important individual Democrat behind that success.

Ziffren’s lifelong mob associations pervade some one hundred pages of Russo’s book, but in 1954 he successfully elected Pat Brown as California’s Attorney-General, who repaid that crucial backing by naming Ziffren’s brother as the Assistant Attorney-General for Southern California, thereby providing the Syndicate’s ongoing activities with a great deal of legal protection despite the continuing hostility of local law enforcement departments.

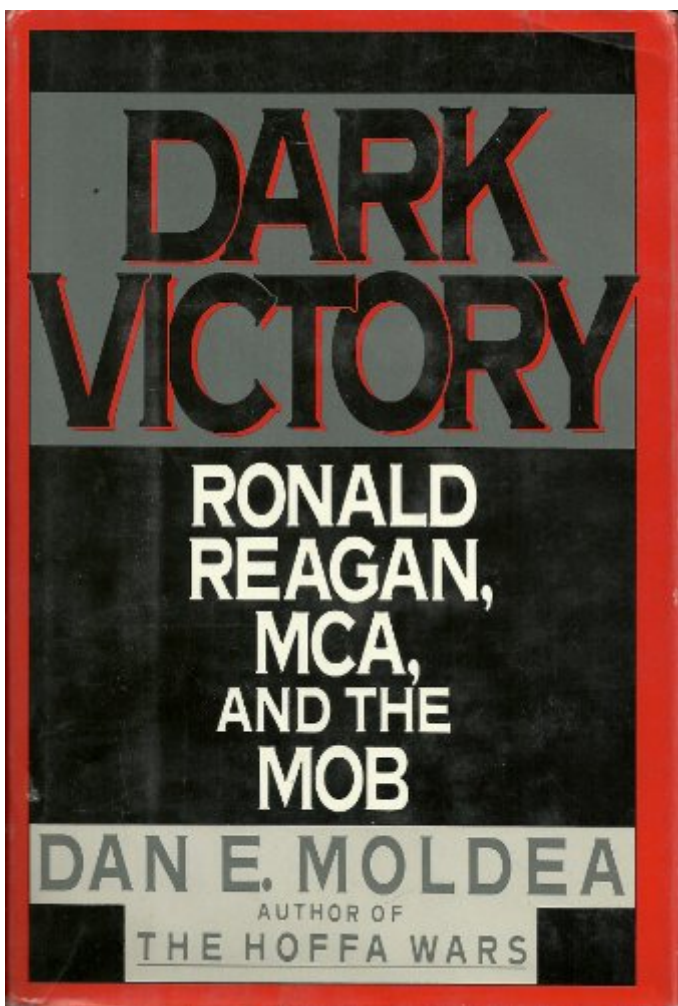
This new kingmaker of California Democratic politics saw his legal risks further diminish the following year when Alex Greenberg, his longtime business partner, was shot to death gangland style on the streets of Chicago, taking to the grave his personal knowledge of Ziffren’s enormous web of Syndicate-related real estate transactions. Ziffren’s power and influence lasted for decades, and when he finally died in 1991 at the age of seventy-seven, his mourners included former California governors Pat and Jerry Brown, future governor Gray Davis, and numerous top Hollywood stars, while he received [uniformly glowing tributes](#) in the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers, none of his provided a hint of his nefarious personal background.

The California Republican Party frequently pursued similar financial temptations. While Ziffren was successfully raising funds from mysterious sources for the 1950 U.S. Senate campaign of Helen Gahagan Douglas, longtime mob lawyer Murray Chotiner was performing the same task for her successful foe Richard Nixon, whose victory established

Chotiner as a leading Republican strategist, both in California and nationwide. Ironically enough, while candidates regularly denounced the underworld ties of their opponents, all these rival Democratic and Republican “Supermob” lawyers had nearby homes and offices in Beverly Hills and generally remained good friends with each other and even occasional business partners, perhaps exchanging casual gossip about the strengths and weaknesses of the various candidates whose campaigns they regularly ran, much like jockeys might do about their different racetrack mounts.

Pat Brown reached the governorship in an upset against Chotiner’s Republican candidate in 1958, and then won reelection against Nixon in 1962, but lost in 1966 to newcomer Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s own political rise had been orchestrated by Hollywood mogul Lew Wasserman of MCA, yet another Chicago transplant. Wasserman together with his mentor Jules Stein also had decades of mob-ties stretching back to Al Capone himself, having regularly employed gangster muscle to strong-arm their business partners and suppress their competitors.

Russo provides the remarkable account of how Wasserman had propelled Reagan, then a washed-up B movie actor, into the presidency of the Screen Actors Guild in 1959 in order to obtain a special industry exemption for MCA, afterward rewarding the future president with an extremely lucrative TV contract. As a result of this successful regulatory maneuver, MCA’s unique business opportunities established Wasserman as the reigning king of Hollywood for decades and he subsequently played a major role in elevating Reagan to the governorship.



Russo’s own factual account of these events draws upon *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA, and the Mob*, a heavily-researched 1986 volume by veteran crime journalist Dan Moldea, which I had previously read and found quite persuasive. The enormous clout of MCA and its executives may have severely reduced distribution and media coverage of Moldea’s

book, while the author was forced to resign from The Institute of Policy Studies, a leftwing DC thinktank dependent upon financing from MCA-connected donors. A very similar fate had previously befallen popular author Henry Denker's 1972 novel [\*The Kingmaker\*](#), a *roman à clef* portraying Wasserman and the political rise of Reagan, which also saw its distribution widely suppressed despite its excellent reviews.

Although Wasserman achieved great wealth and enormous social prominence, he never cast aside his long criminal associations, and for decades his closest personal friend was the Syndicate's California liaison.

That individual was attorney Sidney Korshak, who constitutes the central figure in Russo's long narrative, with one of his rare public photographs gracing the cover. Korshak had gotten his start working for the Capone gang in Chicago, and he soon gained a reputation for his deft ability to bridge the worlds of criminal gangs, racketeer-influenced unions, and legitimate businesses. This effectiveness and his near-total lack of a paper trail in public records or the media established him as the ideal representative of the Chicago Syndicate, and according to later Congressional testimony, they moved him out to Southern California in the early 1950s to oversee their rapidly-expanding West Coast operations.

In the years that followed, Korshak became one of the leading powerbrokers in Hollywood, while also having enormous influence over the unions of the Western states and the businesses dependent upon them, sometimes having the power to start or stop strikes with merely a phone call. Although nominally still a lawyer, he had no office nor staff, and conducted most of his business activities from a private phone he had installed at his favorite table of a leading Beverly Hills bistro, sometimes walking outside for his more delicate discussions in order to avoid eavesdropping.

All references to his overlords back in Chicago were given in code, so that upon returning from their honeymoon, Korshak's new wife noted the long list of opaque messages that had been left by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. FBI wiretaps revealed that the Syndicate bosses warned California gangsters never to contact Korshak directly, but instead to always use his Chicago superiors as the conduit for all requests and communications.

Throughout his long career Korshak went to enormous lengths to maintain his near-total public invisibility, and although he regularly attended Hollywood events and elite dinner-parties, there was a horrified stir when an uninformed screenwriter once accidentally snapped his photograph. Despite a growing awareness of his enormous power in Southern California and his very unsavory connections, he successfully deployed his connections and influence to ward off almost all newspaper coverage. In 1962 the top management of the *Los Angeles Times* suddenly dismantled that newspaper's star investigative unit in order to terminate a long series they had begun running on the Teamsters Union funding for suspicious real estate transactions, which would have inevitably led to Korshak and his inner circle of Syndicate associates. As the *Times*' managing editor later described the situation: "Once you get to the point where you can get a guy to talk, then either you or he or both are going to end up in a lime pit somewhere."

By 1969 widespread local awareness of Korshak's enormous hidden power and deep gangland ties finally prompted the national editor of the *Times* to commission his profile by a young reporter. Despite a great deal of lobbying pressure, this story finally ran, though in sufficiently tame form that Korshak later boasted that all his friends regarded it as a personal advertisement. Still, to avoid any such future coverage, he soon offered Buff Chandler, the newspaper's matriarch, an immediate payment of \$25,000 to ensure that his name would never again appear in print, an agreement she accepted and honored. Over the years, several determined journalists across California would find their heavily-researched

stories killed by their editorial superiors, sometimes causing them to quit their newspapers in disgust.

During Korshak's decades of power, one of the extremely rare major profiles of his activities appeared in *The New York Times*, written in 1976 by fellow-Chicagoan Seymour Hersh, who had already gained renown for breaking the My Lai massacre story a few years earlier, a triumph that earned him a Pulitzer Prize and numerous other accolades. As Hersh later explained, when he began his research, outraged police officials and previously muzzled journalists quickly provided him with troves of background material. But he also soon discovered that Korshak had obtained all his calling records and travel itinerary from a *Times* employee, and he later had a chilling phone conversation with the subject of his probe from a pay phone in West LA. Although Korshak was careful to never explicitly threaten him, his dialogue was very heavily laced with words like "murder...bodies...blood...death...killings," and the reporter still vividly recalled that conversation decades later. Hersh learned from others that Korshak regularly employed that style of intimidation in such situations.

Although powerful lobbying by Korshak's allies and threats of lawsuits led two top *Times* executives to try to stop the investigation, and the Teamsters eventually struck the newspaper on the very eve of the series' scheduled appearance, Hersh's stories ran, and they provoked a great deal of national attention, although they were studiously ignored by the *Los Angeles Times*. Afterward, Hersh was contacted by one of Korshak's nieces, who provided a personal anecdote that included a casual mention of how in his younger days at a family Passover seder Korshak had expressed satisfaction after receiving a call reporting the successful assassination of an Illinois political reformer. In a rare personal interview with Russo, Hersh tersely summarized his appraisal of Korshak: "He was the godfather. There's no question, he ordered people hit."

Aspects of Korshak's lifestyle certainly comported with such notions. His walled and gated home was patrolled by armed guards, reportedly former members of the Israeli military. A studio executive who visited him found the front door answered by a man with a gun, a situation that he had never previously encountered.

Such considerations of personal security may not have been unwarranted. According to FBI documents later released, Korshak had hardly been monogamous in his loyalties, and he had sought to maintain his legal immunity by providing a steady stream of confidential information to Las Vegas law enforcement and the Bureau, facts that surely would have put his life at serious risk if they had been discovered by his underworld confederates. Indeed, when Korshak was in his eighties, he was once suddenly approached by a Hollywood reporter on the street, and reacted as if he assumed that his number had finally come up, then was greatly relieved to discover that the fellow was just a journalist rather than the hitman whose coming he had long awaited.

Korshak's massive impact is described in enormous detail across the pages of Russo's thick volume. He played crucial roles in electing California governors, made Al Pacino available as the star of *The Godfather*, apparently helped ensure that Roman Polanski escaped punishment for raping and sodomizing a thirteen-year-old girl, and was involved in a vast number of legal and illegal business transactions whose dollar values seemingly total in the billions. But with his name almost never appearing in the media, the general public was surely unaware of his existence when he died of natural causes in 1996.

At that point, the news media suddenly regained its courage, and his passing was announced in headlines that must have somewhat puzzled their previously ill-informed readers, with *The New York Times* running "Sidney Korshak, 88, Dies; Fabled Fixer for the

Chicago Mob” and *The Los Angeles Times* “Sidney Korshak, Alleged Mafia Liaison to Hollywood, Dies at 88.”

Money was undoubtedly the mother’s milk of postwar California politics. But the speed with which these recent Chicago transplants transformed themselves into powerful financial figures in their new state was greatly assisted by their participation in a particular financial windfall. They were leading beneficiaries of one of the worst governmental violations of constitutional rights in our national history, and Russo devotes an entire chapter to this dark tale.

Like all other Asians, California’s ethnic Japanese population had long suffered under the harshest sort of racial discrimination, being denied naturalized citizenship and therefore prohibited from owning land, while nearly all additional immigration from their homeland had been banned in the 1920s. Yet although they had arrived as penniless farm laborers mostly around the turn of the century, their intense work-ethnic and diligent savings had established them as a small but reasonably prosperous community by the late 1930s. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to their American-born children, thus allowing their families to eventually acquire large amounts of farmland and other properties, with their visible success sometimes provoking considerable envy from their white neighbors and competitors.

As [I have discussed elsewhere](#), FDR’s desperate attempt to circumvent overwhelming public opposition to America’s involvement in World War II eventually led to his endless 1941 provocations against Japan, which successfully culminated in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Soon afterward, demagogic appeals by politicians and media pundits led much of the public to begin demanding the incarceration of all ethnic Japanese, U.S. citizens or not, and by early 1942 FDR signed an executive order shipping some 120,000 Japanese-Americans off to grim concentration camps, with those individuals sometimes being forced to leave their homes on very short notice. As a result, they lost nearly all the property they had steadily accumulated over two generations, most of which was either seized or otherwise ended up in government hands. Similar government edicts led to the confiscation of numerous German-owned businesses throughout America, many of which had enormously valuable assets.

Within a couple of years, these federal holdings had swelled to include half a million acres of the state’s best farmland, some 1,265 small Japanese-owned hotels, and numerous urban parcels throughout Los Angeles, San Jose, and other cities. In 1942 the federal government estimated the value of these former Japanese-American properties at around \$3 billion in present day dollars, but the huge postwar California economic and population boom would surely have greatly increased the worth of this real estate portfolio by the early 1950s. The business assets and patent holdings of the seized German companies were worth additional billions.

Following the end of the war, all this property needed to be sold off, and powerful Chicago interests recognized this tremendous opportunity. The 1946 elections had produced a crushing national defeat for the ruling Democrats, with the Republicans regaining control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1932.

President Truman thus faced a desperate battle for reelection, and Chicago’s powerful political machine deployed its considerable political clout to place the sales process in the hands of David L. Bazelon, a young Chicago lawyer and leading Democratic fund-raiser with deep Syndicate ties. Bazelon had taken a pay cut of 80% to enter government service, but he soon boasted to the *Washington Post* that he had become “one of the largest businessmen in the country.” His motive quickly became apparent as he arranged the sale of assets for a

fraction of their real value to his circle of Chicago friends and associates, sometimes apparently receiving a secret slice of the lucrative ownership stakes in return.

As an extreme example, Bazelon almost immediately sold Chicago's Henry Crown a twenty-six thousand acre California mine site, containing tens of millions of dollars worth of coal, for a mere \$150,000. A private \$1 million sale of seized German property in 1948 to a group formed by his lifelong best friend and former law partner Paul Ziffren was worth \$40 million by 1954, and Ziffren soon rewarded Bazelon with a 9.2% share of his multimillion-dollar real estate holding company. Another major beneficiary of Bazelon's unusual sales practices later told a Congressional investigating committee that he gave Bazelon a 25% share of his large hotel holding company because he "was just feeling good and generous and was grateful."

These particular hidden gifts to Bazelon only later came to light through chance references that were eventually uncovered by diligent researchers, so we may assume that such transactions probably represented just the tip of an enormous iceberg. It seems plausible that Bazelon received quiet kickbacks totaling many millions or perhaps even tens of millions in present-day dollars in exchange for his very favorable distribution of billions in government assets to the network of beneficiaries who shared his roots in the Chicago Syndicate.

This vast transfer of wealth in the early postwar years from the plundered *Nisei* gave all these mobbed-up Chicago newcomers the financial wherewithal to soon gain substantial control of California's money-based political system. As Art White, the veteran Los Angeles political journalist, later described the situation:

During these years some hundreds of associates of Greenberg, Evans, and others of the Capone crime syndicate, and of Arvey and Ziffren, poured hundreds of millions of dollars into California. They bought real estate, including hotel chains through apparently unrelated corporations from San Diego to Sacramento. They invested in vast tracts of land, built or bought motels, giant office buildings, and other commercial properties. More importantly, they invaded the loan field, establishing banks and home loan institutions. By 1953, Ziffren and his associates had gained control of an enormous block of California's economy. They could finance political campaigns with the best of the native barons.

Russo notes that the FBI analysts subsequently endorsed White's conclusions:

When the FBI reviewed White's research into the extent of the relationship between the Capones and Ziffren, it concluded with a rare declaration vindicating White's conclusions: "The extraordinary success of the adventurer [Ziffren]—and by the same token his backs, who can be traced right into the Midwest and East Coast hoodlum world—*has been proven and documented.* (Author's italics).

Russo's Appendix A provides a long but partial list of the major properties acquired by Chicago's Supermob associates.

The dispossession of California's Japanese-Americans certainly constituted a central factor in the enormous growth of Syndicate-connected wealth and power in that state, and Russo describes it as "an inadvertent boost for the fortunes of the Supermob." He may be entirely correct, but other possibilities come to mind.

During World War II, California was located many thousands of miles from the Pacific theater of operations, while Hawaii was obviously far closer and also served as America's most vital military base; yet the larger population of Japanese-Americans living on those

islands [escaped any such mass incarceration](#). America's top Republican leader, Sen. Robert Taft, was absolutely opposed to the wholesale imprisonment of the Japanese-Americans, as was FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, hardly a man noted for his deep civil libertarian tendencies.

Meanwhile, the earliest and most prominent advocate of the internment policy was California Attorney-General Earl Warren, who used the political issue with great effectiveness to unseat the state's incumbent Democratic governor in the 1942 election. And we should note that Warren's successful gubernatorial campaign was masterminded by Chotiner, a Beverly Hills attorney with strong underworld connections, who later became a good friend and sometime business partner of Korshak and the other members of the Chicago Syndicate circle.

Perhaps Warren and his backers merely believed that demonizing a small and powerless racial minority and demanding that they be placed behind barbed wire would represent an excellent path to statewide political victory in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. But they may also have considered that the concurrent seizure of billions in accumulated property might provide lucrative later opportunities for unscrupulous individuals, opportunities that were indeed fully realized just a few years later.

Bazelon's secret financial payoffs were not the only reward he received for his generous distribution of billions in government-controlled property to his circle of fellow Capone Syndicate alumni. According to the files of a Congressional committee, Bazelon in 1946 had supposedly told a confidant that he was very worried about an IRS investigation into the work he had earlier done for a large Syndicate-controlled brewing company, and that he "needed a federal judgeship to get him cleaned up." So after Truman's reelection, Bazelon, despite completely lacking any judicial or scholarly experience, was named to the Washington D.C. Court of Appeals, the most important appellate circuit, becoming at age forty the youngest such federal judge in U.S. history. This elevation came through the maneuver of a recess appointment, thereby preventing any initial Congressional review of the disturbing rumors already circulating about the practices he had followed in his distribution of billions in government assets.

Former FDR cabinet secretary Harold Ickes, a principled and progressive New Dealer, reacted with total outrage, denouncing the Bazelon appointment as "deplorable" and an "all-time low" [in the pages](#) of *The New Republic*, and calling for a Senate investigation into his distribution of seized property. As a former Chicago newsman, Ickes had been a longtime opponent of the Capone Syndicate and its corruption, and he personally wrote Truman in an unsuccessful last-ditch attempt to sink the nomination: "I happen to know a good deal about Bazelon and I consider him to be thoroughly unfit for the job he holds, to say nothing of a United States judgeship, either on the Court of Appeals or on the District Court."

Until reading these books by Russo, I had never heard of Korshak, nor the vast majority of the other leading figures who seemed to have played such important roles in the criminal conquest of California, such as Ziffren, Greenberg, Fred Evans, Al Hart, and Jake Factor. But Bazelon was a name well known to me from the nearly two decades he later spent as the Chief Judge of America's most important appellate court, where he probably established himself as the most influential jurist not found on the Supreme Court. Indeed, Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. later described him as "one of the most important judicial figures of the century."

In all the newspaper and magazine articles discussing Bazelon's long career, he was uniformly portrayed in extremely favorable terms by liberal or mainstream journalists, often characterized as one of our greatest civil libertarians for his passionate championship

of the abused and the downtrodden. Meanwhile, conservatives often criticized him as a “bleeding-heart liberal” whose judicial activism overly favored the rights of criminals and the mentally ill.

But based upon the true history of his early decades, neither of these characterizations seems entirely plausible to me, and during all those years and contentious disputes, there never once appeared even a hint of his horrific past record of massive personal corruption and outright criminality in support of his fellow alumni of the Capone Syndicate. Perhaps none of these writers and their editors were aware of the facts or perhaps they did not dare raise such a dangerous topic in public. When he died in 1993 at the age of 83, his hugely glowing obituaries in [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) gave no hint of his sordid past, and despite the massive documentation provided in Russo’s thick 2006 volume, [his extensive personal Wikipedia page](#) still remains pristine pure of any such taint.

As Russo notes with considerable outrage, the histories of nearly all of Bazelon’s fellow Supermob criminal confederates who seized political control of California have similarly been whitewashed and forgotten, with almost none of their sordid path to wealth and power ever appearing in the media, and their glowing obituaries instead hailing them as among America’s greatest civil libertarians and most generous philanthropists. In an interview with Russo, Connie Carlson, the former chief white-collar crime investigator for California’s Attorney-General, acidly noted: “Isn’t it interesting how all these ‘civil libertarians’ ended up with the confiscated Japanese land?”

So we see that a small network of organized crime alumni from Chicago seized great political power in California before I was even born and utilized it to protect their corrupt financial schemes. Indeed, in 1978 the head of the Chicago Syndicate reportedly reacted to the encroachments of New York Mafia boss Joe Bonnano by telling one of his enforcers: “Watch that fucking Bonanno...he wants what’s ours—what’s always been ours, California. He can’t have Arizona, and he sure as hell can’t have California.” But as I grew up in the world substantially controlled by such individuals, I never once noticed nor suspected a thing.

The explanation of this paradox is obvious. The petty racketeers and municipal chisellers whose corrupt endeavors were generally run on a small scale either mostly stayed behind in the Windy City or never permanently established themselves among the sprawling and prosperous middle class suburbs that sprang up all across postwar California.

And the notable absence of such highly-visible local corruption and organized crime manifestations in our ordinary daily lives led most of us to assume that such activities were almost entirely absent in our state. We never suspected that a small group of similar criminals were situated in the upper strata of our society, but with far greater financial goals and protected by a cowed or compromised local media. Presumably the large-scale mobsters were pleased that the absence of their small-fry counterparts helped them to maintain their invisibility.

Several years ago, I published an article [that included mention](#) of this important distinction between micro-corruption and macro-corruption:

However, although American micro-corruption is rare, we seem to suffer from appalling levels of macro-corruption, situations in which our various ruling elites squander or misappropriate tens or even hundreds of billions of dollars of our national wealth, sometimes doing so just barely on one side of technical legality and sometimes on the other.

Sweden is among the cleanest societies in Europe, while Sicily is perhaps the most corrupt. But suppose a large clan of ruthless Sicilian Mafiosi moved to

Sweden and somehow managed to gain control of its government. On a day-to-day basis, little would change, with Swedish traffic policemen and building inspectors performing their duties with the same sort of incorruptible efficiency as before, and I suspect that Sweden's Transparency International rankings would scarcely decline. But meanwhile, a large fraction of Sweden's accumulated national wealth might gradually be stolen and transferred to secret Cayman Islands bank accounts, or invested in Latin American drug cartels, and eventually the entire plundered economy would collapse.

Although many of the younger and hungrier individuals who had begun their careers in association with the Chicago Syndicate relocated to California, most of their richer and better-established counterparts remained behind in Chicago, though they seemed to have greatly shared in Bazelon's bounty. These families are now numbered among America's wealthiest, and strong evidence of macro-corruption seems to pervade their activities across the generations.

As mentioned, one of the first suggestions I encountered regarding the important business ties between the underworld and big business was Cockburn's casual mention of Henry Crown's large mob-financed stake in General Dynamics, and the subsequent Pentagon bail-out he arranged. The financial rise of the Chicago-based Crown family figures prominently in Russo's narrative, far beyond their 1947 acquisition of a huge California property from Bazelon for less than 1% of the value of the coal it contained.

Crown had launched his supply business in 1919, regularly securing lucrative government contracts in Chicago's graft-ridden business environment, later enlisting in the military during World War II as a procurement officer. During his service, he was responsible for some \$1 billion in military purchases, with his company being sued by the government for price-gouging just a month before his 1945 discharge. Russo recounts some of the transactions by which the Crowns greatly increased their wealth in the postwar period, including their use of the financial backing of the Teamsters to merge their company with General Dynamics, thereby obtaining a substantial ownership share. The Crowns today are worth nearly \$9 billion, with roughly half of their fortune due to their remaining 10% stake in that huge military contractor.

Russo also describes how the even richer Pritzkers of Chicago arranged for Jay A. Pritzker, the family scion, to serve as Bazelon's assistant in the disposition of seized assets, with that wealthy young man's DC hotel bill dwarfing his meager government salary during the year he was employed there. Congressional investigators later discovered that he had purchased a seized manufacturing company for just 7% of its value, but given the huge gift of stock that his father later bestowed upon Bazelon, numerous other such transactions may have remained hidden. Many dozens of the pages of Russo's book document the underworld associations of several generations of Pritzkers, which began not long after the founding father opened his Chicago law firm in 1902. The enormously diversified current assets of the Pritzker family are listed in Russo's Appendix B, which occupies nearly six full pages, and the Pritzkers today remain one of the wealthiest families in our country, with total assets of nearly \$30 billion, and an enormous record of involvement in recent politics.

Russo came of age during the Watergate era of investigatory journalism and one of his reviewers suggests that his ideological leanings are those of the New Left, a plausible claim given his occasional scathing references to big business, Ronald Reagan, and American foreign policy. Since most of the Supermob members who seized political power in California were Democrats aligned with the liberal wing of that party, Russo often seems uncomfortable in reporting that their conservative Republican opponents sometimes unsuccessfully levied charges of underworld ties against them, but he grudgingly concedes that such accusations were substantially correct.

Bazelon was a major figure in Russo's narrative, and given the author's ideological leanings, he includes a paragraph or two on the former's long subsequent appellate career, noting with apparent approval his ground-breaking liberal rulings on behalf of the rights of the accused and of the mentally-ill. But although the author notes the obvious hypocrisy this involved, he never attempts to directly explore what seems like a very strange juxtaposition of naked criminal self-interest together with extreme social altruism, all bound together in a single individual.

A casual cynic might humorously suggest that Bazelon's tireless efforts to expand the rights of criminals were aimed at protecting himself and his circle of Syndicate friends, but this seems implausible. The sort of corrupt and highly-sophisticated financial dealings in which they specialized were heavily mediated by experienced lawyers and hardly gained much from the expanded protections afforded to simple street-robbers or to the criminally-insane. On the other hand, an idealist might speculate that Bazelon experienced enormous remorse over the vast fortunes that he and his associates had corruptly obtained through the broken lives of 120,000 innocent Japanese-Americans, and his legal rulings were attempts to expiate this guilt. I am skeptical of this analysis.

Another rather cynical suggestion would be that his long national leadership role on human rights and civil liberties was intended to win the plaudits of liberal intellectuals and the media, thereby preempting any later attempt to resurrect the damning evidence provided by the five year FBI investigation of his corrupt sales practices, whose final report ran some 560 pages; and this may be the most plausible explanation. With so much of the modern edifice of liberal jurisprudence based upon Bazelon's rulings, its adherents might be extremely reluctant to allow discussion of the deep criminality of one of its leading architects.

But there is an even more disturbing possibility that comes to mind. Medical personnel and lab technicians usually wear spotless white coats so that even the slightest bit of potentially-dangerous foreign matter can easily be detected and removed. In a society having very low rates of ordinary street crime or social disorder, public attention would naturally focus upon the sort of business corruption and financial crime that constituted the regular activity of Bazelon and his Supermob circle, who would inevitably become primary targets of law enforcement efforts.

But suppose that same society became overwhelmed with the sorts of robberies, muggings, and rapes that evoke the most public fear, along with the chaos and disorder caused by the frightening public behavior of large numbers of the mentally-ill. Surely under such conditions, the citizenry would demand that the authorities concentrate their main efforts on those most immediate threats to public safety, necessarily drawing them away from the white collar crimes being committed in lawyers' offices.

I do not think that this analysis is nearly as implausible as it might seem upon first consideration. Over the last few decades, the bulk of the American population has become totally impoverished, with published reports by the Federal Reserve and other organizations indicating that [60% of the population have less than \\$1,000](#) in available savings, with [40% lacking even \\$400](#). Only a generation or so ago, perfectly good college educations were so inexpensive that many students could cover most of their costs through a part-time job, yet today accumulated student loan debt is over \$1.5 trillion dollars, and with any bankruptcy discharge legally prohibited, this gigantic looming burden has created an entire young generation of permanent debt-slaves, who find it financially impossible to get married or purchase their first home. American health care is the most expensive and inefficient in the developed world, and these costs impose a huge parasitic burden upon the rest of our economy, as well as raising the serious risk that a little bad luck might permanently damage the finances of an ordinary family. But while most ordinary

Americans have become much poorer, a tiny financial elite has increased its wealth beyond all comprehension.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, American candidates and campaigns regularly focused upon economic issues, and this sort of extreme economic divergence would certainly have been at the center of most political campaigns. But these days, our politics has instead become dominated by highly-divisive social issues of much less practical significance, with the latest example being the astonishing focus on “transgender rights,” which impacts only the tiniest sliver of the population and would have been universally ridiculed as pure political satire just a few years ago. Is it so farfetched to suggest that these issues have been deliberately promoted as popular distractions, lightnings rods to divert attention from the simple reality that most people have grown much poorer, even while our ruling elites have vastly multiplied their wealth?

And the personal background of these elites often is remarkably similar to that of Bazelon and his corrupt network of confederates. A ruling elite whose greed, incompetence, and parasitism has greatly damaged the interests of the general public is obviously quite vulnerable, especially if so many of its members derive from a small, distinct minority. But if they succeed in splitting the public into a whole range of mutually-hostile fractions, divided along ideological and ethnic lines, this vulnerability is considerably reduced.

Although versions of this highly-cynical but generally successful political strategy may well have been in operation for the last few decades, I doubt whether more than a tiny fraction of those involved are consciously aware of it. After all, most people—and even most elites—tend to believe whatever they hear and read in their personal selection of trusted media sources. According to biologists, nearly all the individual members of a given school of fish automatically cluster towards each other by instinct, so that if just one or two individuals happen to move in a particular willful direction, all the others will soon follow their lead.

For example, I would not be entirely surprised if Bazelon and a few of his close associates consciously began efforts to disrupt the orderliness of American society so that they would be free to pursue their corrupt or criminal activities undisturbed, much like rodents would prefer a litter-filled and decrepit house in which to build their hidden nests. But it seems quite plausible that most of their liberal epigones have subsequently followed those same ideas while remaining completely ignorant of the very cynical motives that may have originally inspired them.

Consider Bazelon’s grand-daughters Emily and Lara, a journalist and an academic respectively, whose bylines I have regularly noticed over the years [in the pages](#) of *The New York Times* and various other elite publications, generally promoting all sorts of mainstream-liberal causes and policies. Given that they were raised under very different circumstances, I tend to doubt that either of them has anything like the long record of criminality which the elder Bazelon had accumulated as he clawed his way to the top of our society.

Indeed, I wouldn’t be surprised if they remain as completely unaware of his dark history as I had been until quite recently. Perhaps they had simply read all the same media stories on their illustrious grandfather that I did, and regarded him as a towering pillar of liberal moral rectitude, whose principled ideals they deeply committed themselves to follow. So as a consequence, it is quite possible that some of the policies they zealously advocate may have been explicitly designed to be destructive to our society, but they remain totally ignorant of that crucial fact.

Discussions of ethnicity are extremely sensitive in current American society, especially when they might reflect unfavorably upon Jews. For many decades, our educational and media systems have deeply conditioned us to avert our gaze from such matters, even when

they are clearly visible; but some patterns become so overwhelmingly apparent that they cannot be avoided.

Throughout my lengthy discussion of the corrupt looting of the seized Japanese-American property by men with strong Syndicate ties, who subsequently achieved the political conquest of California, virtually every participant I mentioned came from a Jewish background, even including those bearing the most Anglo-Saxon of names.

And this remarkable skew merely reflects the actual contents of Russo's very deeply researched 300,000 word study. Although some of the heroic figures who did their utmost to expose and frustrate the growing power of organized crime were Jewish, notably journalists Seymour Hersh and *Colliers'* Lester Velie, that same ethnic background was found in nearly all of the dozens of Supermob members whose overwhelming success across the second half of the twentieth century becomes depressingly evident throughout the sweep of Russo's narrative arc. When examining the leading beneficiaries of the expropriated Japanese or the Syndicate alumni who seized control of California politics, it takes considerable effort to locate a single Gentile.

While I had been very surprised to discover from Russo's first book that nearly half of the prominent organized crime figures in Chicago were Jewish, I was absolutely astonished to discover from his sequel that nearly all their former colleagues who had moved on to acquire vastly greater wealth and political power in California fell into that same category. And whereas all the Chicago gangsters were always notorious as gangsters, most of their far more successful California counterparts had their backgrounds carefully airbrushed by the media, instead being portrayed as highly successful businessmen, political leaders, or philanthropists.

To his enormous credit, Russo does not flinch from this reality, candidly presenting the origins and backgrounds of the key figures he discusses, and indeed the definition of the "Supermob" which he places at the top of his preface highlights the "Russian Jewish heritage" of the "group of men from the Midwest...who made fortunes in the 20th century American West in collusion with notorious members of organized crime." He follows this by summarizing the central thesis of his fascinating text:

Two types of power dominated the twentieth century: the visible, embodied in politicians, corporate moguls, crime bosses, and law enforcement; and the invisible, concentrated in the hands of a few power brokers generally of Eastern European and Jewish immigrant heritage. Operating safely in the shadows, these men often pulled the strings of the visible power brokers. Although they remained nameless to the public, they were notorious among a smattering of enterprising investigators who, over decades, followed their brilliant, amoral, and frequently criminal careers. The late Senate investigator and author Walter Sheridan dubbed them the Supermob.

Although I had merely glanced over this short passage at the beginning of his very long book, I returned to it afterward, and found it an extremely accurate summary of his massively-researched study.

Russo may or may not be aware of it, but for most of the last couple of centuries, Eastern European Jews have enjoyed a tremendous reputation for rampant criminality, especially involving crimes of corruption, vice, or financial gain. Since the end of World War II, overwhelming Jewish influence in the media and academic worlds has led to massive suppression of this historical reality, much like the criminal activities of the Supermob disappeared almost without a trace prior to Russo's ground-breaking research. But his story would hardly have surprised knowledgeable Americans a century or more ago. Before Jewish political and media had fully established itself, writers sometimes candidly

discussed such criminal tendencies in ways that might seem extremely discordant to naive present-day Americans.

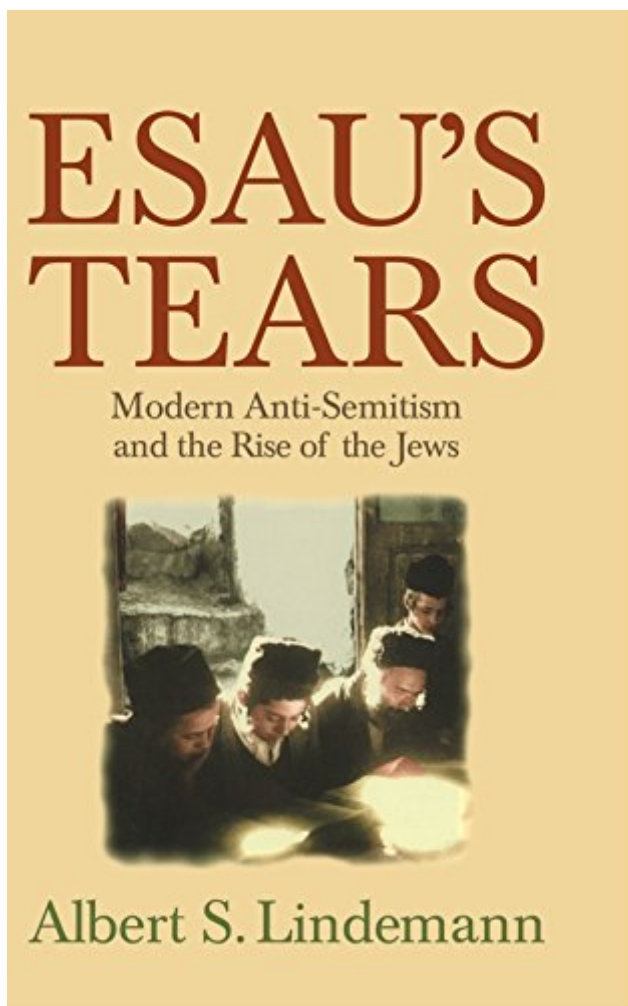
In 1908 former general Theodore Bingham was serving as Police Commissioner of New York City, and near the end of that year he published [a long article](#) on his city's foreign criminals in *The North American Review*, then one of our leading intellectual magazines.

His discussion seemed quite careful and even-handed, but he noted that Jews had three times the crime rate of the remaining population of his overwhelmingly immigrant city, a figure considerably higher than that of any other group, even including the Black Hand-plagued Italians. This factual assessment sparked a huge outcry by Jewish organizations, and although he immediately rendered a personal apology, he nevertheless was summarily removed from office a few months later.

In 1913, E.A. Ross, one of our greatest early sociologists, published a fascinating analysis of different immigrant groups. He noted the high incarceration rates of Italians, but emphasized that this was mostly due to acts of personal violence unrelated to criminal activity, the predations of the Mafia notwithstanding, while despite the longstanding Irish reputation for drunken brawling their crime rates had receded to among the lowest of any group a couple of generations after their immigration peak. By contrast, although he emphasized the high ability of Jews, he could not avoid also mentioning their notorious tendency for swindling and dishonesty, with their predatory crime being the highest of any group, while they sought to avoid punishment by widespread use of perjury. These sorts of candid observations by Ross have apparently prompted many decades of unfair vilification by more recent Jewish historians.

By the 1920s, Jewish media influence had reached the point at which newspapers and magazines had become very reluctant to report on the misbehavior of that group, which led wealthy industrialist Henry Ford to begin publishing *The Dearborn Independent*, a weekly paper with enormous national circulation, that was willing to violate those growing taboos. He later collected together the series of articles dealing with Jewish misdeeds, and published them in four volumes as *The International Jew*. Despite its notorious reputation, most of contents are rather mundane accounts of corruption, criminality, and financial misbehavior that seems little different from what Russo documented a few decades later.

Prior to the modern decline of belief in religion and other elements of the supernatural, swearing binding oaths to God constituted an important means of enforcing business contracts and determining guilt in legal proceedings, with present-day courtroom procedures still containing a vestigial element of those notions. So some years ago I was quite shocked to discover from [Prof. Israel Shahak](#) that traditionally-observant Jews annually undergo a religious ceremony that declares all their future oaths for the prospective year null and void in advance, thereby freeing them from any such restrictions. This religious loophole was obviously an important competitive advantage for those engaging in dishonest economic activity let alone outright crime.



In 1997 Cambridge University Press published *Esau's Tears* by eminent scholar Albert Lindemann, a 500 page study of 19th century European anti-Semitism. His historical evidence demonstrated a very widespread pattern of Jewish criminality across Europe, with nineteenth century France having been rocked by huge financial scandals engineered by immigrant Jews, which impoverished huge numbers of small investors. The situation in Russia was [even more serious](#):

As Lindemann candidly describes the tension between Russia's very rapidly growing Jewish population and its governing authorities, he cannot avoid mentioning the notorious Jewish reputation for bribery, corruption, and general dishonesty, with numerous figures of all political backgrounds noting that the remarkable Jewish propensity to commit perjury in the courtroom led to severe problems in the effective administration of justice.

Some historical tendencies remain remarkably consistent over time.

All of us have our own areas of special expertise, and naturally tend to accept the conventional narrative on most other matters. Prior to reading Russo's two lengthy works, much of my media-influenced understanding of American organized crime would have been entirely mistaken.

Towards the end of his second volume, Russo notes the tremendous hypocrisy surrounding Bazelon's ring of Jewish beneficiaries, who acquired the properties of the interned Japanese not long after their own German relatives had been similarly victimized by the Nazis. In the past, I would have casually nodded my head at this obvious analogy, but I now think he may be mistaken in his history.

Not long ago, I came across a very interesting book written by Sir Arthur Bryant, an influential historian whose [Wikipedia page](#) describes him as the personal favorite of Winston Churchill and two other British prime ministers. He had worked on *Unfinished Victory* during the late 1930s, then somewhat modified it for publication in early 1940, a few months after the outbreak of World War II had considerably altered the political landscape. But not long afterward, the war became much more bitter and there was a harsh crackdown on discordant voices in British society, so Bryant became alarmed over what he had written and attempted to remove all existing copies from circulation. Therefore the only ones available for sale on Amazon are [exorbitantly priced](#), but fortunately the work is also freely available at [Archive.org](#).

Writing before the “official version” of historical events had been rigidly determined, Bryant describes Germany’s very difficult domestic situation between the two world wars, its problematic relationship with its tiny Jewish minority, and the circumstances behind the rise of Hitler, providing a very different perspective on these important events than what we usually read in our standard textbooks.

Among other surprising facts, he notes that although Jews were just 1% of the total population, even five years after Hitler had come to power and implemented various anti-Semitic policies, they still apparently owned something like one-third of all the real property in that country, with the great bulk of these vast holdings having been acquired from desperate, starving Germans in the terrible years of the early 1920s. Thus, much of Germany’s 99% German population had recently been dispossessed of the assets they had built up over generations, sometimes due to the same sort of corrupt financial practices that Bazelon and his friends had used to enrich themselves in California at the expense of the Japanese.

So although Russo is correct in believing that there was a strong correspondence between the distressing events he covers in California and the somewhat earlier developments in Germany, the analogy may not be exactly what he believes it to be.

During the late 1970s my favorite show on television was *The Rockford Files*, in which James Garner played a wise-cracking private-eye in Los Angeles, and I was quite disappointed when the series was cancelled at the end of 1979. A foreign friend of mine in college noted that Garner’s very square jaw and bold demeanor made him look remarkably like a young Ronald Reagan, who had been lifted to enormous political heights by his usefulness to Lew Wasserman, whose MCA-Universal also happened to produce Garner’s show. But just a couple of years ago I happened to discover that the backstory to those events, and how the actor’s willingness to stand up for his rights may have led him to a sharply different fate.

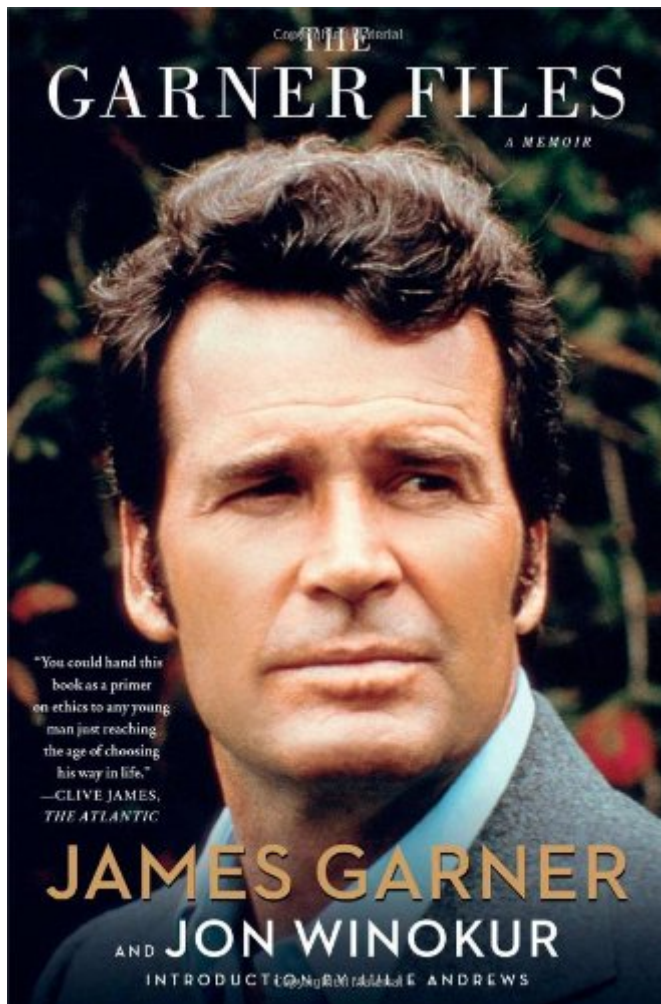
Garner had agreed to relatively low fees for each *Rockford* episode in exchange for a substantial share of the overall profits, which seemed likely to be enormous once it went into syndication. But near the end of the fifth season, he accidentally discovered that under studio accounting the extremely popular show had accrued cumulative total losses of \$9.5 million, and was unlikely to ever turn much of a profit. Garner had suffered a great deal of damage during his very physically-demanding series, doing nearly all of his own stunt-work and typically involved in two fist-fights or beatings in each episode.

Soon afterward, he stopped coming to the set based on his doctor’s recommendation that he seek immediate treatment for a bleeding ulcer, although MCA accused him of malingering, and NBC soon canceled the series. Although it was extremely rare back then for actors to undertake the huge expense of pursuing litigation against a studio, Garner was wealthy enough to do so, and he decided to sue MCA for \$20 million over what he claimed was its fraudulent accounting, which had deprived him of his contractual share of the profits. Such

successful action by a leading television star might obviously inspire all sorts of other Hollywood individuals to demand similar changes.

One week after the last *Rockford Files* episode aired on NBC, Garner was driving in slow, rush-hour traffic on Coldwater Canyon Drive when his car was bumped by another vehicle. After he stopped to get insurance information, he was immediately attacked and severely beaten by the driver, who turned out to be a young former Green Beret, resulting in three days of hospitalization for 51-year-old actor. By a rather strange coincidence, the personal chauffeur of MCA Chairman Lew Wasserman happened to be present as an observer at the scene.

Despite his serious injuries, Garner eventually went ahead with his lawsuit, which was finally successfully settled after eight years of litigation. But perhaps the unusual incident led many other, less well-established actors to reflect upon the sudden misfortune that might enter their lives under the wrong circumstances.



Oddly enough, the brutal public beating of one of the biggest stars on television received much less attention than one would expect, or at least I never heard of it at the time, nor during the decades that followed, only learning of it from Moldea's book on MCA's dark history.

Moreover, the attack seems to have been almost entirely scrubbed from the Internet, with my inadequate Google skills only locating the most obscure sources, such as a PDF copy of an AP wire story in [the Tuscaloosa News of Alabama](#), though the details are provided in Garner's 2011 memoirs, *The Garner Files*. It's quite possible that the incident was exactly what it purported to be, the sort of random, violent assault that can happen to any of us without cause or warning, even including leading television stars locked in bitter contract disputes with a major studio having deep Syndicate roots. But I do think the story would

have fit perfectly into Russo's narrative of early Chicago days of MCA in the 1930s, when its top executives worked closely with the thugs of Al Capone.

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